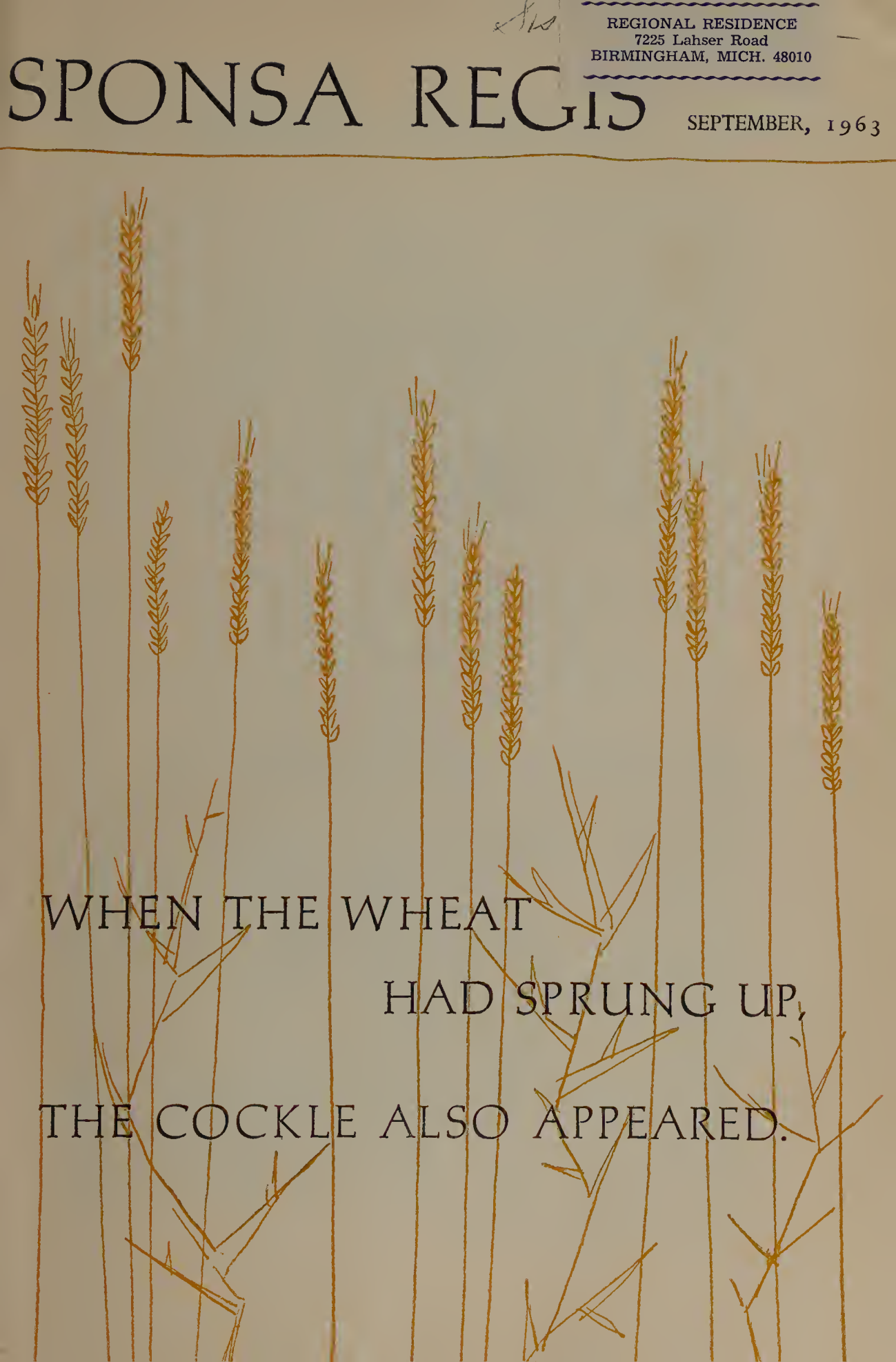


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# SPONSA REGIS

SEPTEMBER, 1963



WHEN THE WHEAT  
HAD SPRUNG UP,  
THE COCKLE ALSO APPEARED.

# SPONSA REGIS

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# God of Gratuitous Love

ROBERT GUELLUY

If the Lord has arranged all things that we might spend our lives in his house and in his service, it is without doubt in order that we may learn through one another and with one another to know him better and to love him more. This is really the only "conversion" that is demanded of us in the religious life: to know who the Lord is and to be occupied with him. Oh, of course, we have many faults to correct, many problems to solve; but what is asked of us is something far more profound. We are not just to look deeper into ourselves, to exert more effort on our own persons. No, what is asked is more startling than this; it is no longer to look at ourself at all.

This is the conversion we need to make: to learn to live for the praise of God, not just to "do good" but to glorify God in thinking no longer of self but of him.

To be a Christian is to be liberated. The Christian is not someone concerned about making something of himself. The Christian is not a man occupied with himself, even with his virtuous desires; the Christian is someone disengaged from self, taken up with God and the neighbor. It is that which is supernatural about Christian life.

Really, in its most profound meaning, the evangelical call is a call to abandonment; but this does not mean simply "giving up" or "letting go." An even greater stripping and a more total detachment are demanded. We are no longer to think of self at all, no longer to be busy with self, no longer to esteem the good we do or to dramatize the evil we commit. To be free from self is truly the greatest detachment, the most thorough kind of stripping. And it is this to which we are summoned, nothing else: to holy littleness, childlike obedience, confident surrender.

In other words, we are asked to be so open that God may accomplish *his* work in us, a work exceeding all our dreams, and this in spite of all our sham. We must learn to surrender to him

both our desires and our disappointments, all our egotistic thoughts, whether they be noble ideas to which we remain very humanly attached or disappointments which depress us because our pride is hurt by them. The conversion we need demands that we become more occupied with God than with ourselves, more taken up with what he is doing for us than with what we wish to do for him. It is the spirit of faith which will effect this in us.

Usually we are led to one of two extremes in our thinking. When all goes well we are happy, hugging a righteousness and well-being based on pride; or else, when nothing goes right — and there is always something wrong with ourselves or with others! — we are upset, embittered, hostile to others as well as to ourselves. Every life knows this alternation between satisfied pride and hurt pride; although the forms may vary, the same wretchedness prompts them all. This is because we lack the basic humility of one who lives by virtue of a gift, who lives in the disposition of having received all.

It is necessary to break through this infernal circle of flattering self-satisfaction and fretful discontent. Only a firm belief in love can free us. Once we understand how we are loved, once we realize the Father's utterly gratuitous and unmerited affection for his children, we will be liberated from this deep-rooted attachment to ourselves. As it is, a humility that is truly oblivious of self escapes us in the very measure that we try to cultivate it, for we exert our self, once again by pride, in an effort to become humble.

We should strive to dwell on what God is doing for us rather than on what we are doing for him. Perhaps we should make an examination of conscience different from our usual type: an examination on the *present*. This examen would awaken and sustain in us sincere gratitude. Before meditating on our sins, we should meditate on what is in order, on all the concrete evidence of divine predilection. This will help us to believe in the absolutely gratuitous affection of the Father and to live in the joy of being loved. We so lack this spirit; yet it alone will change us. We resort to pseudo-conversions: "I'm determined to overcome myself. Till now I haven't done too well, but I'll not be caught napping again." So with a little pride and self-assertion one establishes a bit of



equilibrium. Actually, we only adjust the proportions of self and sin, and the balance remains the same.

The great problem is to be content with God. If only we were content with God! We are deterred before we start by a nagging sentiment of self love. We murmur, "I don't want to be like a new convert; I'm not a first communicant. I don't want others to say, 'At last he has understood!' This idea is so simple and childlike that it is unworthy of me." Yes, it is difficult to be practically, concretely content with God in such a way that nothing else matters at all, in such a way that one consents simply to walk every day in the joy of being loved.

This is not to be a more refined type of self concern; it is to be enamored of God. The Lord calls us to live in a communion with him, in a loving exchange, recognizing who he is. But we, on our part, raise the great objection that we know who we are. We murmur within, "I know myself well and I see quite clearly what's going to happen." This is not the problem; what matters is to know the Lord. We do not know him enough. It is only in his light that we can really know ourselves. It is only a belief in divine love that will enable us to pass from the visible motives we have for feeding our pride to the invisible motives for being profoundly happy: happy to be loved.

This is the desert march, the radical stripping, the great renouncement: to be free from all in the joy of being with the Lord. This is the Christian life: to leave aside the non-essentials in order to endure the privations of the desert while being led to the promised land, yet throughout the journey reveling in the company of God. So it was with the Hebrew people in the desert when God was closer to them than ever before.

The Christian life is somewhat like the reflection heard so often during the wartime evacuations: "Perhaps we shall recover nothing, maybe everything will be destroyed. It doesn't matter if only we stay together, if only the family is not split up." So in Christian living: trials and demands count little if only we are with the Lord. God tried to make his people in the desert understand this, but they forgot his hidden presence and sighed for the fleshpots of Egypt. They ceased to think of him and instead

bemoaned the long way they had yet to travel and the difficulties they were bound to encounter.

Let us profit from the inspired writings; let us heed the divine invitation to be content with God in the joy of being loved, to be happy with him in the love our faith guarantees us, to be pleased with him in a deepening spirit of faith which makes the invisible alive for us.

There are some pertinent verses in the Book of Deuteronomy. At the outset, Moses tells how the law, which is the people's response to God's free election of them, should be understood. Fidelity to this law is simply a way of expressing confidence in unmerited love. We must accept the law, knowing the goodness of the Father, understanding that what he asks of us he asks for our good. We are to see in it the form which his predilection takes and the manifestation of his grace, and to obey him through trust in his love.

These first chapters of Deuteronomy insist on the greatness of God, describing and revealing him so that the Israelites may be moved to observe his law as it deserves: to think more of the Lord than of themselves. The emphasis is on the unique character of the God of revelation: he is the one who loves for nothing, the one who loves first, the one who has freely chosen us. What poverty of spirit this depends on our part! Knowing that everything comes solely from grace, from his sheer magnanimity, we are destitute of *any* claim deriving from ourselves.

"If Yahweh has attached himself to you and chosen you, it is not because you are the most numerous of all peoples; for you are the least numerous among all peoples" (Deut. 7:7). These words have value not only for the Hebrew people but for each one of us. If God has chosen us, it is explained only by his love. Were he a shrewd businessman or an enterprising executive, had he in addition a sense of efficiency and a methodical spirit calculating what he would draw from humanity by way of profit, it is obvious that neither you nor I would have been chosen to follow him. If God has chosen us, it is not because we were particularly interesting or because he could expect something from us; it is not through a spirit of bargaining, but simply because his heart is good. This

is what you must consent to; this is what you must welcome: *the joy of being loved for nothing*.

We poison our lives by the vain desire to be loved for something, or by the despair of always having empty hands. We must accept supernaturally, in the joy of being loved, our insufficiency and the limitations of our existence. This joyous acceptance will at the same time liberate us from all comfortable self complacency, all that pride which makes us disdain others.

If God has attached himself to you and chosen you, it is certainly not because there was some prior worth in you. It is surely not because he found there something to his advantage, some profit you could bring to him. One finds in quite reliable books that God has created the world for his glory. Let us reflect a little on what this really means. If I approach the matter seriously I must admit that I will give God very little glory and that without doubt he had more peace without me than with me; I cause him more trouble than satisfaction. Nor am I alone in this situation. If God has created the world so as to be magnified by it, he has poorly calculated the results; the venture is quite disappointing.

In truth, the glory of God is *to love for nothing*. That is the glory for which he has created all things. And heaven will consist in our wondrous astonishment at being so loved. It is thus that I shall glorify God for all eternity. What I want to bring him is my joy in receiving everything; this is the need he has of me. What he expects of me is this marveling welcome in regard to his totally gratuitous affection. What do you expect to bring him if not what he has already put into your hands?

Heaven will be comprised of people happy to be there for nothing. The others — those who proudly esteemed themselves to have succeeded in life — will be disputing in hell. One will find them arguing with their predecessors and collaborators: "You have reaped what I have sown, you have benefited from the fruits of my labor." Those who think they have earned something will spend eternity quarreling. Heaven is going to be a community of persons thrilled to be there *gratis*. This will be our initial amazement on arriving, one of which we will never weary and from which we will never recover. We will be forever in awe at this

divine marvel. We will ask ourselves: "How did I ever get here? I can't understand it at all. It is certainly not because I was the strongest of all persons!"

Behold the Christian life: to strive earnestly to merit heaven, yet to receive it finally as being beyond all merit; to struggle courageously to win eternal happiness, but knowing we can never gain it except by gift; to do our best while rejoicing that all is given us. Even our effort itself is a grace, a divine favor which has more of God in it than of ourselves.

Consider well: if God has attached himself to you and chosen you, it is not because you are the greatest of all persons; it is not that you are worth the trouble. Be humble; be grateful that you are not worth his trouble and then bow before this ultimate explanation of your existence in this world and in your community: love. Unreasonable as it may seem, God loves you dearly. To look at you one would not think so, but faith assures us it is so. . . . God is held captive by the love and fidelity promised to your fathers. He is prisoner of his own goodness; what he has begun he cannot discontinue.

How striking is that prayer of Jesus on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). In the Gospels, it is obvious that our Lord does not make a great tragedy of the adulterous woman, of Mary Magdalene, of Zacchaeus the publican — these cases do not appear very grave to him. What does appear fatal is the refusal of God out of a sense of self sufficiency, the hardness of heart of the Pharisees. Yet even in regard to them, on what note does our Lord end? "Father, forgive them. . ." We are much like these Pharisees, but we can take heart. How could the Father refuse to hear the plea of his beloved Son on the cross, this prayer of Jesus in agony? It is evident that we know not what we do. . . .

The text of Deuteronomy continues: "But it may be the thought will come into your mind, 'These nations outnumber me; shall I have the strength to dispossess them?'" (Deut. 7:17). So also you reason in your hearts: "The difficulties are stronger than I; how can I possibly surmount them?" You are thinking of yourself, of what you are going to do, even while I speak to you of the Lord! You give yourself halfheartedly to contemplation, re-



maining preoccupied with self, rather than discerning the heart of the Father, the invisible presence encompassing us, the divine life surging within us at this moment. Instead of being busy with him, we remain terribly taken up with ourselves; we say, "But the difficulties are so great, the nations to be conquered are so much stronger than I. How shall I ever arrive at the promised land?"

And the answer comes: "Away with these fears!" Fundamentally, you and I are afraid, and this fear is the basis of our problems. You have given up because you have despaired of becoming a saint, of reaching the promised land. But Scripture says, "Away with these fears! Remember what the Lord did to Pharaoh and to the rest of the Egyptians, the great plagues you witnessed, the portents and the marvels, the constraining force the Lord your God used, the display he made of his power, to rescue you" (Deut. 7:18-19). Think of the difficulties already overcome, of all the things you formerly feared but through which you have safely emerged. "Do not be frightened, throw off your paralysis, because in your midst is Yahweh, your God."

Together we have to rediscover, above all else, this living presence. God is in our midst, the strong and mighty God. This God who loves you and who has chosen you for nothing is the God who will do his work in you, being all-powerful. But not all at once will this happen. "Little by little, now here, now there, Yahweh your God will destroy these nations. Perhaps to you the conquest will seem too long—you would prefer to exterminate the enemies at a single blow. If you were to empty the country of all its inhabitants—this promised land which you are not yet capable of enjoying—it would be to your detriment, for the wild beasts would be multiplied" (Deut. 7:22). These words are said *to us*. Our enemies, for the moment, are useful to us; our failures are salutary. They deepen faith in us; without difficulties, we would live in a purely superficial manner, we would feel no need of the Lord, we would not think of him. Difficulties are beneficial, and if God permits them it is again because he loves you indeed, because he wills your good.

"And now the Lord God means to settle you in a rich land, a land that has water coursing down in streams, and deep wells that break out from plain and hill; a land of wheat and barley,

of vine and fig tree and pomegranate and olive, a land where oil and honey flow. Here without fear of want you will win your livelihood; all shall be yours in abundance; the very stones of that land will yield iron, and there is copper to mine from its hillsides; here you may eat your fill and bless the name of the Lord your God for the wonderful land he has given you. Nevertheless, it will be a land of trials where life will be difficult. You will be in danger, then, of forgetting the Lord your God, of neglecting the laws and decrees and observances you have learned this day. You will eat your fill, you will build yourself fair houses to dwell in, you will have herds and flocks; gold and silver and all good things shall be yours. But beware lest your heart swell with pride, and you forget the Lord your God! He it is who rescued you from bondage... Never are you to flatter yourself that valor of your own, strength of your own, has won you wealth; rather, remember the Lord God and the strength that he gives you" (Deut. 8:7-14, 17-18).

If you were perfect; if recollection were easy for you; if you could pray without any difficulty, as it were, spontaneously; if you were the embodiment of patience and a paragon of kindness; if the whole world were drawn to praise your mildness, your self possession and your fidelity to duty; in short, if you were a living model of virtue, then certainly would you need to be on guard! You would be in a fearful situation, for you could be content with yourself. And you could say in your heart: "It is the strength of my hand that has accomplished this supremacy; my power has worked these marvels." Rather, "Remember the Lord your God; it is he who has given you this power, faithful to the covenant sworn to your fathers."

What constant peril we are in! If we manage to withstand the trials of departure, we are soon tempted to despair, remembering the fleshpots of Egypt. And if we are in the promised land, we find ourselves faced with the exigency of living as if in the desert, since we are not to be attached to all the riches God has given us.

The procedure is, indeed, what we pointed out in the beginning: to renounce discouragement and discontent as well as the independence which makes us take ourselves seriously. We

must stop being guided by the visible so that we may commit ourselves in faith to the invisible, live in the joy of being loved, and walk happily under the eyes of the Father, aware that his most distinctive trait is to love for nothing, to love first. He loves in a way that nothing can precede or anticipate. It is he who has taken the first step toward us and he never stops doing so. This divine initiative is fundamental in our Christian faith.

One can find generosity, endurance and devotedness outside Christianity. What belongs properly to Christian life is building our lives on faith — faith in a choice which has selected and called us simply because the heart of the Father is good and because he is faithful to the promises made to our fathers in the faith and to his love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Today, we must reaffirm our faith in this love; we must forget ourselves in order to be occupied with what faith tells us of our God. He has first loved us; that is tremendous! He has no need that an object be lovable before he loves it; that is startling. To love what is worthy — even I can do that. What is unique in God is that he loves *first*, without the object being worth the trouble. That is gratuity, divine spontaneity.

Let us try to understand the Lord, to know the heart of the Father. Oh, that we might know the Father! This is the great liberation, the great revelation; no other is necessary. All our effort must be channeled to concentrating on him, to living more for his praise. In the throes of our disappointments and disillusionments, our sufferings and failures, let us renew in ourselves this faith in the invisible and this unshakable confidence in God's unwavering love.

# *Life by Death*

A. DURAND

And now he took occasion to tell the people this parable: There was a man who planted a vineyard and let it out to some vine-dressers, while he went away to spend a long time abroad. And when the season came, he sent one of his servants on an errand to the vine-dressers, bidding them pay him his share of the vineyard's revenues. Whereupon the vine-dressers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant, and him too they sent away empty-handed, beating him first and insulting him. Then he sent a third, and him they drove away wounded like the others. So the owner of the vineyard said, What am I to do? I will send my well-beloved son. Perhaps they will have reverence for him. But the vine-dressers, on seeing him, debated thus within themselves: This is the heir, let us kill him, so that his inheritance may pass into our hands. And they thrust him out of the vineyard and killed him (Luke 20:9-15).

This is the terrible little story which our Lord chose in order to teach us how he, the Son of the eternal Father, would be received when he came to offer the gift of life to his mother's people. The Son meets with worse than indifference. He meets with suspicion, hatred and violence.

The vineyard may be taken as standing for our Lord's own nation, the Jewish people. Through the great prophets of the past, God had tried to persuade them to serve him. The last of his messengers was John the Baptist. And the common fate of these prophets was to be rejected, abused, sometimes killed, by the people to whom they were carrying the divine message. At last God resolves to send his own Son, and we need not be told what was his lot.

The parable speaks grim truth. During his short years on earth, our Lord did enjoy the support of some friends and followers. But they were few and none too faithful. By the world, by the mass of his nation, he was received pretty much with indifference. By their leaders he was received with fear, and even with hatred.



They could not rest until they had cast out of their city and put to death the divine person who had come to bring them life.

But strangely enough, this death is always spoken of by him as something that had to happen. It had to happen; and more strangely still, it was right that it should happen. "Was it not to be expected that the Christ should undergo these sufferings and so enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). He foretold his own end more than once. The very parable with which we have begun is evidence that he knew how his work for his people was going to be concluded. And indeed, what else could be expected? When light seeks to penetrate darkness, the darkness by nature resists; in the struggle of life against death, death will try to overcome for ever.

A divine person could avoid death, of course. No one can kill the child of God: no force can stand against him who is in all things equal to his Father. But Christ always made it plain that he took it for granted that he should die. He even maintained that this was the Father's decision for him, and that he must consent. Now, human enemies could do no more than destroy the human in him: they could do him no injury in his divine nature. So what he must be teaching about his death is that his Father wanted a man to die, wanted a man to give up all that he had, all that he was, for no reason but that such was the eternal will. He wanted a man to accept death freely, but it must be no ordinary man. He asked the death of that man who would be source of divine life for all men, the death of the second Adam.

Why such a terrible and mysterious demand? The reason lies in the same cause which makes the human race so strangely indifferent to the great death. For what is wrong with our human family that it can be simply uninterested in its God? Or that it can even be roused to fear and hatred at his approach? What do we see to be afraid of in the Son of our eternal Father, who comes to restore to us the divine life? How can unhappy mankind reject life and light? What dark and evil force has got hold of our race to make it behave in this way?

Something dark and evil has entered into the human family, right enough, and God in his mercy has made plain to us what it is. We must notice that only from his teaching have we learned

what went wrong; for — we may never allow ourselves to forget — if he had not so taught us, we would never have learned what a terrible curse lies upon our race; and we might have gone on in the delusion that we were normal and good, when in fact we are twisted and treacherous.

The first man, so the revelation goes, was not left in the natural state to which his created nature would have destined him. In the allegory with which the Bible begins we see how God, after forming the first two human beings, transformed their lives by placing them in a mysterious garden, which would yield them every perfection and beauty, and where they were intended to live as his special friends. This mysterious Eden may be taken as symbolic of that gift of life, that sharing in the divine life, which we call grace. In the beginning, therefore, man had been granted the gift which Christ, so much later, came to restore.

But the allegory goes on to relate that in the garden there stood one tree of which the first human beings were forbidden to eat, and this was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Again the tree and its fatal fruit are symbols.

What can be meant by a tree the fruit of which could yield knowledge of good and evil?

Our first thought is that good and evil must mean moral good and moral evil: right and wrong, the things commanded by God to be done or avoided, the law. So the eating of a forbidden fruit, which would bring knowledge of such good and evil, should mean an attempt by man to decide such things for himself, to take over the business of making his own set of commandments, so that a thing would now be right or wrong because he himself had so decreed, not because God had so decreed.

This would be bad enough, and a deep insult to the majesty of the infinite mind; but good and evil bear a still wider meaning. For good can mean simply anything whatever that is good for us; and evil, anything whatever that is bad for us — as food is good for us, and a poison is bad; and health is good for us, while injury or disease are bad. And now what becomes the significance of the attempt to eat of the tree of knowledge? It can only mean this, that man was determined to have the power always to tell

what would be good for him and what would be bad for him.<sup>1</sup> Such a desire sounds innocent enough, does it not? Surely it is legitimate for a thinking creature to seek to learn what may do him good and what may do him injury. What desire could be more natural? How can he help wanting to know beforehand what course he should take to ensure his own advantage?

But if we think a little more deeply, we should see that there is a sense in which such knowledge is not the right of any creature. Suppose I demand to know, now, at this moment, how all my enterprises will end; to know beforehand the circumstances of every mischance, every piece of good luck or bad which lies in wait for me, every encounter with another human being, every possible contingency. Now, at this moment, possessed of such unimaginable foresight, I could begin to lay my plans. I could set out to manage my own life with no help from anybody. Never again would I become the victim of chance, never again be forced to endure helpless worry and frustration. And never again would I need to utter a prayer. From my moral universe, faith, hope, and charity would vanish. But this is a mad dream, of course. Only a divine knowledge of the universe can yield complete vision of all contingency in it. God our Father, who made the world of created things, alone can guide and direct it. It is his duty to care for what he has made; he is the providence of all things. If any creature attained knowledge of good and evil, he would need providence no longer.

There was a person who had already tried this. There stood, among those higher creatures whom God had made, among the mysterious intelligences whom we call angels, one great intelligence, one mighty mind, who could not bear the thought of holding grace, of holding the means of happiness, in a kind of precarious dependence on the kindness of someone else; who could not submit to being guided for ever by another, and denied the right to be his own master. In his higher fashion, he too committed the original sin: he demanded to become his own providence. "In a certain fashion both Satan and man sought to become the equals of God by wishing to rely upon no one but themselves, spurning the divine order of things."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae, 163,2,c.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

By what he did, the angel committed a kind of suicide, of course; for he had received grace, just as Adam had, and now cast out the life of God from himself, plunging himself into eternal death and darkness. No matter what he does now, he can only make things worse for himself. But he can still hate providence, try to block providence, try to take over control of the universe, and to persuade other intelligent beings that they should do just as he did.

What is this command God has given you, not to eat the fruit of any tree in the garden? To which the woman answered, We can eat the fruit of any tree in the garden except the tree in the middle of it; it is this that God has forbidden us to eat or even to touch, on pain of death. And the serpent said to her: What is this talk of death? God knows well that as soon as you eat this fruit your eyes will be opened, and you yourselves will be like gods, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:1-5).

The consequence of the original sin? Man got pretty much what he wanted: he was left to himself; he lost his innocence, his eyes were opened, he awoke to a new and bitter knowledge of good and evil. But cut off from grace, no longer supported by a sharing in the divine life, though conscious of the good he could not escape the evil, he could not control himself. His mind injured, his passions all awake, his will weakened, he had to go forward now in his state of sin. In the eyes of God, he no longer lived at all; the energy of the Holy Spirit had left him, and all that he could bequeath to his children were his natural powers, weakened and distorted. The human family would now have to wait for many centuries before that child of God would come who would once more bring together in himself the two houses.

The everlasting inheritance of our house is the original sin. Let us not be so foolish as to suppose that we can understand all this. Even the sin itself we do not perfectly understand, much less how it could be passed on to all the children of him who first fell victim to it. God has revealed to us as much as it is good for us to know. Perhaps if he tried to teach us more, we would understand it still less. At any rate, enough has been shown to us to make us see why, when a second Adam appeared, a second human figure who stood in the place of his entire race, it was right that he should be asked for his life; and that, until he had



himself given up that life, he should have no right to restore what was lost. Only an utter acceptance of providence could make up for the rejecting of providence, and the most a man can do to show that he is sure that God is managing things perfectly is to let God destroy him if God so chooses. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15).

So the second Adam came into the midst of the children of the old Adam and they, true to the spirit of their natural father, when they paid any attention whatever to the son of God, were inclined to hold him in dread, fearing that he would take over the guidance of their world and of their lives. Caesar was better than this. And so they could know no peace until they had made an end of him. But, by reason of his role as the second Adam, he wanted to die, since only in this way could he undo the original sin.

In our world, is Christ still received according to his own description in the terrible little parable of the vineyard? He must be. In a certain measure, even by us, he must be. We know how true it is that towards him the vast majority of mankind remain indifferent, while their leaders are so often filled with fear and hostility. The old war between life and death, between light and darkness, must go on. And even in ourselves?

Of this I am certain, that no principle of good dwells in me, that is, in my natural self. It is not the good my will approves, but the evil my will disapproves, that I find myself doing. And if what I do is something I have not the will to do, it cannot be that I bring it about, it must be the sinful principle that dwells in me. . . . . Piteable creature that I am, who is to set me free from a nature thus doomed to death? (Romans 7:18-20, 24).

We are all inheritors of the original sin, the sin that has come down from our natural father, Adam. To be a member of our race is to suffer from it: it is our birthright. This is the sin which struggles in our blood, our bone, our heart and mind. This is the sin which is second nature to us, the one we are born with a taste for; the urge that is so deep in us, so instinctive, that when we try to oppose it, we seem to be torturing ourselves for nothing, denying all that can make life worth living, resisting the direction of our very being, of our very self. In fact it is the sin which is so much part of us that we call the war on it a war against

self, and come to speak of an old self and a new self — the old being that which lived by this sin, while the new is trying its best to live by the life of the second Adam. It is the evil which will never quite die out in us, which will never leave us for good, until we have given our life for it, as our Lord did: the evil which hides under a hundred different forms, often innocent-looking forms, from each of which comes the age-old whisper: "What is this talk of death? . . . as soon as you eat this fruit, your eyes will be opened, and you yourselves will be like gods, knowing good and evil." And we try it again, and our eyes are opened, and we do recognize good and evil and as never before, and are left more helpless than ever to pursue the one and avoid the other. But this repeated disaster we cannot admit to ourselves, and so instead of fighting the ancient evil we resolve to hide it; to hide it first from others and then from ourselves. And we can succeed, succeed so well that we no longer recognize when we have fallen into it again.

What is the original sin? Oh, just the desire to manage for ourselves, the conviction that we know better, the wanting our own way; and the deep certainty that, if things were always as we judge they ought to be, all would be well. It is the inability to believe that we can ever be happy and free until we are left to ourselves and allowed to live our own life. And it is the fear, the vague uneasy fear of our Lord, the fear that if he be allowed full control of our lives he will take over everything and leave us unable to call our soul our own.

But we cannot call our soul our own, because it is his. And we can never hope to live our own life, because it does not belong to us. Our soul, our life, our day are his vineyard, entrusted to us. He sends to demand the revenue. He sends his Son. And at the sight of him we begin that old debate within ourselves: "Here is the heir, here is the person who has the right to all we have got. If we could get rid of him, at least this once, at least for this once we could manage our own affairs."

We are always trying to find some sort of middle way, to achieve an endurable compromise, but there is none; we must renounce ourselves entirely. It has been well said that everything in our nature is contrary to the love of God, and that

therefore self must be denied and renounced at every turn. If it be sanctity we are after, there is no hope of it without hard and painful struggle in which we never attempt a truce with fallen nature. Life has come to us by a great death: the death of the second Adam. And that life will triumph in us only by death, by the death of our unhappy, restless, unappeasable self. Obedience is killing. This is one sure sign by which it can be recognized: it is always killing. Every consent to the Father's will against our own, every acceptance of what fallen nature cries out against, is a death. And each little death, obedient and free, will be followed by a burial, a resurrection and an ascension. For this message of Christ is not a sad or desperate one; it is one of joy and life. The deep malady of man, the malady which is the curse of his birth, at last has a remedy; and the remedy is sure. "If we die with him, we shall live with him; if we suffer with him, we shall reign also with him . . ." (2 Tim. 2:11-12).

## THE AUTHORS

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# *"First-Fruits Unto God"*

PAUL HINNEBUSCH, O.P.

And I saw, and behold, the Lamb was standing upon Mount Sion, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand having his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads... They are virgins. These follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were purchased from among men, first-fruits unto God and unto the Lamb (Apoc. 14:1-5).

To understand why consecrated virgins are called "first-fruits unto God and unto the Lamb," we must go back to one of the oldest ceremonies of the ancient Hebrew liturgy. We read in the Book of Deuteronomy:

When you have come into the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you as a heritage, and have occupied it and settled in it, you shall take some first-fruits of the various products of the soil which you harvest from the land which the Lord, your God, gives you, and putting them in a basket, you shall go to the place which the Lord, your God, chooses for the dwelling place of his Name. There you shall go to the priest in office at that time and say to him, 'Today I acknowledge to the Lord, my God, that I have indeed come into the land which he swore to our fathers he would give us'....

'He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying power, with signs and wonders; and bringing us into this country, he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey. Therefore I have now brought you the first-fruits of the products of the soil which you, O Lord, have given me' (Deut. 26:1-10).

By the offering of the first-fruits, the Israelites were really dedicating the entire harvest to God. The first-fruits were a symbol of all the fruits of the earth, and therefore in offering the symbol, they were offering all that it symbolized. "If the first fruit is holy," says Saint Paul, "so is the entire dough" (Rom. 11:16).

And in offering the fruits of the earth, the Israelites were testifying that the land itself and all that was on it belonged to the Lord and was consecrated to him. That is why eventually



they began to call their land "the holy land" (Zach. 2:16). But above all, the people living on this land were God's own, his chosen ones, holy to the Lord. Saint Paul was speaking of all the progeny of Abraham through Isaac when he said, "If the first fruit is holy, so is the entire dough."

The offering of the first-fruits, therefore, as we can see from the words of the offering, was a profession of faith perpetuating the memory of God's choice of Israel to be his very own people, his deliverance of them from Egypt by the outstretched arm of his power, and his gift of this promised land to them. It was an act of gratitude to God for choosing them with such special love that he called them his "first-born" and his heirs. "Thus says the Lord: Israel is my son, my first-born" (Ex. 4:22).

The consecration of the whole people of Israel to God was even more clearly professed by the offering to the Lord of the first-fruits of the womb, the first-born son of every family. The law prescribed that the first-born son should be bought back by his parents at the price of five silver shekels (Num. 18:16). Since the first-born were thus returned to their parents, God required that the entire tribe of Levi be consecrated to him to substitute for the first-born. "The Lord said to Moses, 'It is I who have chosen the Levites from the Israelites in place of every first-born that opens the womb among the Israelites. The Levites, therefore, are mine, because every first-born is mine. When I slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, I made all the first-born in Israel sacred to me, both of man and of beast. They belong to me'" (Num. 3:11-13).

As consecrated persons, the Levites were a living symbol of the whole people of Israel as God's consecrated "first-born." They were a perpetual sign reminding all people that they belonged to God. They were like a living sacrifice perpetually being offered to God as an outward sign that the people as a whole was forever offering itself to the Lord. They were living "first-fruits." Now we see why in the Apocalypse Saint John calls the consecrated virgins of the Church "first-fruits unto God and unto the Lamb."

It is important to note that the Levites and the first-fruits were not a mere substitute for the people—they were not offered

so that the others would not have to be offered, but so that the others would be offered in and through them. They were not substitutes for the people, but symbols of the people, and therefore they *were* the people. For a symbol represents, and therefore *is* the thing it represents. In the person of the Levites the whole people were dedicated to divine worship as a living sacrifice, and therefore the Lord said to Israel: "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. You shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine" (Ex. 19:6, 5).

Consecrated virgins likewise, as a symbol of the Church, *are* the whole Church, and in them the whole Church is perpetually offering herself to God. As a living sign of the Church they make visible the whole Church under its most wonderful aspect, its holiness, its consecration to God, its union with Christ and its partaking in his own sanctity. "The most exquisite fruit of virginity consists in this," says Pope Pius XII, "that virgins make tangible, as it were, the perfect virginity of their Mother the Church, and the holiness of her intimate union with Christ."<sup>1</sup>

For this reason, consecrated virginity is truly a sacred mystery: that is, the life of the virgin is a symbolic ritual giving outward expression to what the Church herself is. The sacrificial life of the virgin is a kind of liturgical expression of the Church in her action of living up to her consecration to God, immolating herself as a victim of love. The whole Church, the whole people of God and every single member of it, must make this oblation of self; and therefore virgins, as living signs of this, inspire and cause the rest of the Church to live up to their baptismal consecration to God.

As first-fruits, virgins have a very special likeness to Christ, for in the Scriptures he too is called "the first-fruits" and the "first-born" (1 Cor. 15:23; Rom. 8:30). Like the Levites and the virgins, Christ on the cross is not just a substitute sacrificed instead of mankind, but in him all mankind were sacrificed. He was a symbol representing all of us, a pledge to God that all of us in turn would sacrifice ourselves in him and with him as one mystical person with him, in the Mass and in our daily living.

<sup>1</sup> *Holy Virginity*, NCWC ed., 1954, #30-31.

Virgins, as first-fruits, offer themselves, like Christ, as a pledge on behalf of all mankind.

Their whole being, then, is a sacrament in the sense of sacred mystery or symbolic rite. "The visible sacrifice," says Saint Augustine, "is the sacrament, that is, the sacred sign, of the invisible sacrifice."<sup>2</sup> Since as first-fruits virgins are the symbol of the interior sacrifice of the whole Church, they themselves must accomplish more perfectly and more intensely than the average person the inner spiritual sacrifice which is outwardly expressed in their whole being as religious.

So that the whole Church will truly be expressed in them, they have to contain the whole Church in their hearts, identifying themselves with the entire Church in burning charity, so that in love they are one mystical person with the Church. In offering themselves to God they will truly offer the whole Church to him, and like Saint Catherine of Siena, they will blame themselves for the ills of the Church because they have not always been perfect in fidelity to Christ.

The first-fruits, we said, were a pledge, a guarantee that the whole harvest would be God's, dedicated to him. Likewise, the consecration of the virgin is a pledge that other souls also will come to God. The more perfectly the virgin lives up to her inner sacrifice of self, becoming a total holocaust of love with Christ, the more perfectly she will draw other souls to God in her footsteps, both because of the meritorious and redemptive value of her offering, and because as a living sign her example will inspire others to give themselves to God, each one according to the requirements of his way of life.

Thus as first-fruits, virgins in a very real sense gather in the whole harvest of souls to God by their example and their life of self-sacrificing dedication. The mission harvest throughout the world is dedicated to God in the cloister in the person of the virgin, the first fruits to God and to the Lamb. All the mission fields of the world are blessed, consecrated, made fruitful in the consecrated virgin, wherever she be. And so in a special way the harvest of souls is her responsibility, and is abundant in proportion to her fidelity to her vocation as "first-fruits."

<sup>2</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, X.

If her whole life is a visible sacrifice in which the whole Church and all mankind is offered to God, this sacrifice has to be offered "according to the rubrics." The sacrifice is pleasing to God and inspiring to men only when it is carried out according to the religious rule, the sacrificial ritual.

Early in Hebrew history, we have seen, it was the Levites who were the first-fruits, while the whole people of Israel were the harvest, the royal priesthood, the living sacrifice. But as time passed and Israel received new insights from God concerning her mission, the chosen people as a whole, not just the Levites, came to be called first-fruits, while all the nations of the world were seen as the full harvest. Thus the Lord speaks to Jeremiah:

Go, cry out this message for Jerusalem to hear:  
I remember the devotion of your youth,  
how you loved me as a bride,  
Following me in the desert,  
in a land unsown.  
Sacred to the Lord was Israel,  
the first-fruits of his harvest;  
Should anyone presume to partake of them,  
evil would befall him, says the Lord (Jer. 2:2-3).

These were the words which inspired Saint John to write in the Apocalypse the passage in which the Church and her members are described as the virgin bride of the Lamb who follows him wherever he goes, even into the desert of suffering and persecution. But because she is the first-fruits of the Lord, sacred to him, he will protect her, punish those who try to partake of them, rescue her in glory from her enemies. And she is the guarantee of the full harvest of the nations.

For Saint John, in the verses which we have been applying to consecrated virgins, was thinking primarily of all the members of the Church. The members of the Church are first-fruits — they are called virgins because they have been rescued from the harlotry of idolatry — and the rest of the world is the harvest still to be gathered. But since consecrated virgins are the living symbol of the Church, the Fathers of the Church had no hesitation in applying this passage in a special way to them.



But what virgins are called to accomplish in a more excellent way, every member of the Church must accomplish in his own circumstances and vocation. We should therefore teach the faithful in our care that they too have to be first-fruits unto God and unto the Lamb, helping to bring in the mission harvest throughout the world by the perfection of the gift of themselves to God by serving him well in their own particular way of life. For the Church is one, one mystical person, one chaste virgin espoused to Christ. The more perfectly her individual members fulfill their particular vocation, doing the duties of their way of life in loving fidelity to Christ, the more successful the Church as a whole will be in accomplishing her mission throughout the world.

Speaking of the resurrection, Saint Paul calls Christ the first-fruits from the dead (1 Cor. 15:23), and as such, is the pledge of the resurrection of all. He is the grain of wheat which fell into the ground and died, but rising again brings all to life in himself—that is, all who die with him on the cross. This is another reason why religious are called first-fruits. Not only are they a sacrifice with Christ representing the whole Church, but they are also first-fruits from the dead, having the “first-fruits of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:23). They are a living symbol on earth of the future life in heaven, where “they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as angels of God” (Matt. 22:30). Because they depart from the world by their three vows, they are not of the world, and are a striking sign of the life to come to which all Christians are called.

Therefore in a most special way they have the obligation to be crucified to the world, but alive to God in Christ Jesus, “always bearing about in our body the dying of Jesus, so that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal frame” (2 Cor. 4:10). Their very existence as religious, dead to the world, is a symbol that all Christians are citizens of heaven, not of earth, and are here only as wayfarers.

The Law of Moses, prescribing how the first-fruits are to be offered, ends by saying:

Having set them before the Lord, your God, you shall bow down in his presence. Then you and your family, together with the Levite and the aliens who live among you, shall make

merry over all these good things which the Lord your God has given you (Deut. 26:10-11).

We should daily make merry as we offer ourselves at Mass as first-fruits, rejoicing with one another as we partake of our eucharistic banquet. And though we then go out into the Lord's fields to labor and suffer in gathering in the rest of the harvest, and to be ourselves grains of wheat falling into the ground to die, yet in our tribulations we rejoice in the hope expressed in the psalm:

Although they go forth weeping,  
carrying the seed to be sown,  
They shall come back rejoicing,  
carrying their sheaves (Ps. 125:6).

The first-fruits by their fidelity shall bring in the full harvest, of which they themselves are the pledge.

## RENEWAL

What with leaf-fall and the sere, one were not  
So readily unwintered; taste of lotus  
Even had made false haven fair (quote us)  
But for the new breath filling slack sails. Got  
Quit of subjunctives, gripping fact, and hot  
In pursuit now, small securities laughed at, note us,  
In the great launching since the Spirit smote us  
Staggeringly, dislodged from the safe spot.

No more reversal now, but straight ahead,  
Sure-piloted, with singing galleys strong;  
No wind nor tide-set matters, goal in sight  
(Whereunto lighter craft had sooner sped  
Yet, cargo jettisoned, we beat along),  
No cheating Ithaca, but Gates of Light.

MOTHER MARY ANTHONY, S.H.C.J.

# The New Ideal

BROTHER WILLIAM MODLIN, C.S.C.

The prime virtue of our religious life is charity, the mutual love of benevolence. The practice of charity is an individual's closest approximation of Christ, each individual variously testifying to God's infinite perfections, the potential perfection of each different personality being expressed perfectly in God.

Charity, like grace, works through nature but does not supersede nature; and since it is our nature to be unique and distinct individuals, charity will not distort our God-given potential. Each of us has a "built-in" desire to assert his own personality; and the charity we practice will best enable us to communicate to others our special and distinctive gifts. Charity will, in fact, perfect us as individuals; and, in the process of our development, charity will contribute to the development of those around us.

Our contribution to the group through charity, however, seems to be expressed more and more by modern writers in idealized, or more correctly, Americanized terms. The "other-directed"<sup>1</sup> American, long accustomed to great emphasis on group acceptance and conformity to the crowd, may tend to think of charity "in practical terms" — as a vehicle and tool for successful social relations. In many modern essays charity and a multitude of other virtues seem to converge in group dynamics. Some modern writers treat charity as a kind of panacea which dispels social difficulties of any kind and with which that "ecce quam bonum" feeling prevails, thereby approximating that version of virtue which stems and is derived essentially from naturalism<sup>2</sup>, by which charity becomes simply the

<sup>1</sup>David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 21. What is common to all the other-directed people is that their contemporaries are the source of direction for the individual — either those known to him or those with whom he is indirectly acquainted, through friends or through the mass media. The goals toward which the other-directed person strives shift with that guidance: it is only the process of striving itself and the process of paying close attention to the signals that remain unaltered throughout life.

<sup>2</sup>Naturalism: the belief that the natural world is the whole of reality and that there is no supernatural or spiritual creation, value, control, or significance; it holds that scientific laws can explain all phenomena.

basis for "togetherness." Of course, charity will include the application of good social psychology, and a genuine love for our neighbor will require effort to produce a well adjusted group. But the notion that the one inevitable result of our charity will be successful social intercourse simply does not stand up. The success of our charity does not depend upon natural results, upon social acceptance or the ability to "fit in." If this were the case even Christ, charity itself, could be considered a failure. Far from being socially accepted, his charity was met with contempt, misunderstanding, crucifixion.

In the perfect "community" of the Trinity, complete union of persons is consonant with both equality and total giving, whereas man's giving can be genuine only as God's continued creativity and sustaining power permit. Man, created by God and dependent upon him for existence, can never act as one completely self-possessed: therefore he is incapable of complete self-surrender or perfect union with another creature. But while man's giving is seldom easy, the injunction remains: love one another — imitate Christ's love. Our efforts to practice the charity commanded sooner or later bring our limitations to the fore; and with them the ultimate and almost crushing realization of our failures: our failures in spite of our vocation, our good intentions, our religious life. In one sense it is almost understandable that the Christian criterion becomes watered-down, since, appalled by the greatness of charity's demands, man "protects himself" by limiting, by rationalizing—substituting surface features for what he lacks interiorly. In time, the resulting superficialities not only substitute for charity, they come to *mean* charity! We simply "handle people." Conversational rapport becomes proof of our virtue, as does the ability to "get along." Our supernatural ideals become lost in the maze, only one step away from *The Organization Man*, from reflected appraisals, from "How To Cheat On Personality Tests."<sup>3</sup> Charity, if interpreted essentially as an expedient method of gaining purely social ends, loses all significance as a supernatural virtue; it becomes merely one variety of a natural and perfectly understandable attitude, the identical attitude portrayed by *The Man In The Gray Flannel Suit*.

<sup>3</sup> William F. Whyte, Jr., *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956).



But the fact is that it cannot be "perfectly understandable" to return benefit for enmity, to return good for evil. It is opposed to all instinctive desires, to even the greatest of sociological concepts. If man can barely render good for good, can he be truly altruistic without having attained a vantage point higher than his own? How deep into human nature must we go to find prejudice, selfishness, blindness, stubbornness? By what means are we capable of surmounting personal limitations? The answer is to be found not in sociology but in Christ's "new man." Only a charity resembling Trinitarian union — participating in it! — will enable us to "reflect, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, being transformed into his very image." Unquestionably, human motives play a useful part in community balance; but error does exist when virtue is equated with social effort on the natural plane.<sup>4</sup> A group of "good fellows" is not to be put on the same level as a community of brothers in Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup> Sanctity does not mean that we will be appreciated socially or that the community members will give us a standing ovation when we enter the community room. The practice of charity is more likely to entail sustained self-renunciation, with little or no cheers from the spectators.

In at least one sense, however, the self sacrifice involved with virtue cannot compare with the trial, the exquisitely beautiful frustration of martyrdom-to-the-collective-thinking which results from giving first place to the desire to "fit in." Productive only of a condition in which the individual never surmounts the least common denominator, there is a unity of a sort, a surface union; but eliminated is Christ's injunction, "Let your light shine before men" (Matt. 5:16), with its emphasis on individuality, not blind sacrifice to the fluctuating expectations of the group. For all the heroic charity of Saint Therese, she could still frankly comment: "We must rise above what the Sisters say...what they do. We must live in our monastery as though we were to spend only two days there."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Equally incorrect is a contrary notion that, so long as motives and intentions are "purified" by directing them to God, the religious becomes well nigh incapable of faulty judgments, rationalizations, self-deception, or conceit.

<sup>5</sup>*Communal Life*, translated by a Religious of the Sacred Heart (Westminster: Newman, 1957), p. 234.

<sup>6</sup>Summarium of the Process as quoted in Victor de la Vierge, *Spiritual Realism of St. Therese of Lisieux* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1961), p. 75.

The distinctions here are not merely academic, for the danger is real, subtle, and deadly. The core of the religious life has already begun to degenerate when the mentality of the world is seen as a standard, and the Christian attitude towards life as only one variety of it. To desire socially adept individuals is all well and good but, "Do not even the Gentiles do that?" (Matt. 5:47). That is merely an ethical approach, and with ethics alone the religious can neither satisfy God nor fulfill his intrinsic possibilities. Are we to interpret the whole of the Gospel message as simply a code of higher ethics? What is commanded, actually, is the charity expressed by Christ: "Greater love no man has than to lay down his life for his friend" (John 15:13).

The "success" of charity for the religious is primarily spiritual, outlined more genuinely and realistically in the Gospel account of the passion than anywhere else. And it is demonstrated in the lives of the saints. The "result" of charity meant burning at the stake for Saint Joan; for John of the Cross it meant prison, beatings, the contempt of his community; for Basil Moreau, founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, it meant his own community disowning him and his living for years as an outcast. How, then, can modern authors list "that ecce quam bonum feeling" as an effect of virtue without batting an eye? Must charity, the love of Christ to be reflected in each of us, reflect contemporary society first of all...?

Christ's love ended in crucifixion. As members of his Body, crucifixion is continued and extended in each of us. As Christ shuddering before his passion, we may also cringe at the "impossible" task of loving one another. Only hesitatingly, supplicatingly, "in fear and trembling" can we make even a beginning. We fail, again and again. But "he who has not spared even his own Son but has delivered him for us all, how can he fail to grant us also all things with him?" (Rom. 8:36). "It is God who works in you both the will and the performance" (Phil. 2:13). Supremely above the natural: "Christ in you — your hope of glory!" (Col. 2:27).

FATHER JOSEPH KREUTER, O.S.B., founder of *Sponsa Regis* and its editor for eighteen years, died rather suddenly on July 14, three days after his 80th birthday.

Father Joseph was intimately concerned with the life and problems of Sisters throughout his life. His personal sincerity, good judgment, and devotion to God made him a retreat master of unusual influence, in spite of a weak voice and a tendency to Germanize certain words. He early became associated with the liturgical movement, cooperating with Father Virgil Michel, O.S.B., in many of the first publications of the Liturgical Press. For thirteen years he was Subprior of Saint John's Abbey. Drawn away from *Sponsa Regis* in 1947 by the pressing needs of a war-ravaged Germany, he spent an entire year there dispensing alms and helping religious communities re-establish themselves. He died at Browerville, Minnesota, where he was chaplain at the local hospital. May God grant him abundant peace.

## Book Reviews

READINGS IN EUROPEAN CATECHETICS (LUMEN VITAE STUDIES). Edited by G. Delcuve, S.J. and A. Godin, S.J. Lumen Vitae Press, Brussels, Belgium, 1962. Pp. 194. Paper, \$3.00. Available through Newman Book Shop, 73 W. Main St., Westminster, Maryland.

Any publication of the Lumen Vitae Press merits attention. American awakening to new movements in catechetics has been slow compared with that of Europe, but we are, at last, awake. We can profit, then, by this anthology of leading articles published during the last ten years. These appeared originally in other-than-English languages. We are as-

sured of the merit and quality of the articles when we see that they are edited by Fathers Delcuve and Godin, S.J.

The range of topics in *Readings in European Catechetics* is wide. The first article, by Father Ranwez, S.J., is a sort of touch-stone because it gives the typical trends in the contemporary movement. In the area of historical development, "God's Plan" is outstanding, and should be re-read and pondered. The study by Father Lefebvre on "The Religious Life of the Tiny Child," in the section dealing with philosophical and psychological aspects, is valuable and appealing.

One statement from Brother Vincent Ayel's article on the training of catechists must be quoted: "...in the catechesis it is first the doctrine that directs the method, and only an authentic spiritual life can bring the pedagogical work into effect." A practical guide as well as matter for meditation! The discussion of "Celebration" left the reviewer with raised eye-brows, and unconvinced of the value of that "technique." But the analysis of problems in the use of pictures is excellent. They are not merely "to be looked at" but they must "proclaim the message."

This book will give pause—and help and inspiration—even to old-timers in catechetics.

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*MEDITATIONS ON THE PSALMS.*  
By Bernard C. Mischke, O.S.C.  
Sheed and Ward, New York, 1963.  
Pp. xviii, 298. Cloth, \$4.95.

The great Saint Teresa, an admirer of the gift of intelligence, said that she preferred a less holy but more intelligent spiritual director to a more holy but less intelligent one. The author of this book of meditations possesses more than that which is required of a spiritual director, for the composition of this book reveals that the ideas in it were conceived in the mind of a spiritual man, and clothed in the expressions of a literary man.

The use of the psalms as a point of departure is in itself part assurance for the efficacy of these meditations. The psalms, tremendous and inspired poems, carry a mean-

ing as strong and true for us today as they did for the Hebrews when first they heard David pour out the anguish or the joy of his soul in prayer to God. Christ himself put his seal on the psalms, his last words were taken from them. The Church uses the psalms extensively in her liturgy.

Collectively these meditations, like the psalms, contain a harmonious balance between the two great moods of man, joy and sorrow. Specifically, they run the whole gamut of man's concern: his fears, desires, struggles, emotions, and hopes. As such, these meditative commentaries can readily be applied to every phase of a Christian's life, showing him how to refer the vicissitudes of life with humility back to God.

Father Mischke brings out the psychological pungency, the therapeutic value, and the human warmth of the psalms. Above all, these 150 *Meditations on the Psalms* can serve as an impetus for intimate conversation of the soul with God.

Sister Mary Xavier, O.S.U.  
Cardinal Newman High School  
Columbia, South Carolina

*THE MEANING OF PRAYER.* By Louis Colin, C.S.S.R. Translated by Francis X. Moan, S.J. The Newman Press, Westminster, Md., 1962. Pp. xiii, 302. Cloth, \$4.25.

Father Colin believes that of prayer—"... a kind of eighth sacrament, prayer that enlightens, consoles, uplifts, strengthens, heals, sanctifies and eventually saves..."—enough can never be said (p. xii). Hence, this doctrinal and de-



votional treatise on *The Meaning of Prayer*. Although prayer of praise and of thanksgiving are handled briefly after the author's initial chapter on the definition of prayer and its various forms, Colin devotes the bulk of his work to the prayer of petition, "its nature, efficacy, qualities, degrees and role" (p. xiii). The final chapters are dedicated to liturgical prayer, the Mass and the divine office. As is characteristic of all Colin's prolific writings, he draws copiously from the Scriptures, the Fathers, Papal encyclicals, theologians, saints and masters of the spiritual life. Unfortunately, it is possible for an author to find quotations to support ideas that may be quite deceptive, or that present only partial truths.

Some statements found herein are, at first sight, startling—statements like: "Prayer even exceeds charity" (p. 40). However, Father proves prayer's "power supreme" (Chapter 4) by delineating its unique relation to the gift of final perseverance (pp. 40-41). Also, one could be a bit confused by the different emphasis he places on what he terms "prayer of action" and purely contemplative prayer. In Chapter 15, he insists upon the necessity of the former: "For a Christian, to act is to pray. Action is an extension of prayer..." (p. 177). And after all, "Prayer of action was Our Lord's form of prayer" (p. 178). Yet, in Chapter 17, Father Colin discounts the need and efficacy of the action when he quotes, with apparent approval, a bishop of Saigon remarking to the Governor of Cochin, China: "'Ten

Carmelites would be of greater help to me than twenty missionaries'" (p. 207).

Although this volume was written for all Catholics, it may be recommended only for the experienced reader, who will be able to supplement the author's rather subjective approach by an awareness of contemporary studies which have thrown new light upon many of the matters that are discussed.

Sister Ann Rita, G.N.S.H.  
*The Grey Nuns Motherhouse*  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

*UNDERSTANDING THE LORD'S PRAYER.* By H. Van den Bussche. Translated by Charles Schaldenbrand. Sheed and Ward, New York, 1962. Pp. 144. Cloth, \$3.00.

The Lord's Prayer has provided a fertile field of exploration for many great minds in Christendom. Father Van den Bussche further elucidates the meaningfulness of the prayer by paralleling the progressive revelation of Christ in the gospel with the central concepts of the Our Father.

The fatherhood of God and the coming of the kingdom are the dominant ideas developed in this commentary. The author traces the gradual unfolding of both these concepts in the Old and New Testaments.

Fundamental to the understanding of the prayer is the fact of discipleship. As the disciple grows in his relationship to Christ so do the requests of the Our Father take on particular meaning. The Christian who lives at this present time between the first coming of

Christ and his final return finds himself involved in realities of eschatological dimensions. By praying for the sanctification of God's name, the coming of the kingdom and accomplishing of the divine will, he commits himself in his present actions to work for their fulfillment. Furthermore, the disciple prays as a member of a community, a community orientated towards the coming of the kingdom, a kingdom which demands complete surrender of each individual member.

Sister M. Eugene Reynolds, O.S.U.  
Ursuline Convent  
Paola, Kansas

*VISION OF PEACE.* By Wilfrid Tunink, O.S.B. Farrar, Straus and Company, New York, 1963. Pp. xiv, 332. Cloth, \$4.95.

For all religious who need help in integrating spiritual exercises, penitential practices and community customs, *Vision of Peace* is a mine of golden ideas. It is much more than a suggestion book, however. The author has developed (sometimes at too great length) the outlook and attitude of Saint Benedict as expressed in his Rule for monks. Using lavish quotes from the Desert Fathers, particularly Abbots Moses and Isaac, Father Wilfrid shows that Saint Benedict set purity of heart (peace is the word used in the Rule) as the immediate goal of monastic life. Configuration to Christ, the monk's final end, is to be achieved in and through the monastic family. As a member of such a group, a monk has access to all the aids he needs to attain per-

fection. He vows to eradicate vice and cultivate virtue through silence, humility, holy reading, the divine office and manual labor—in other words, in the living of the "active life." He also aims to seek a richer possession of the new life of Easter, i.e., closer union with God, by living faithfully the prescriptions of the Rule. His means of union with God is outlined in the monastic practices mentioned above. If he remembers God's special presence everywhere and recalls it through the assiduous use of ejaculatory prayer, he is also living a life of contemplation. The fruit of such a religious life is to "cleave to God and heavenly things"—contemplation.

The main divisions of the book: The Vision, The Monastic Family, The Active Life, and The Contemplative Life help the reader to follow the author's development of his theme. The book is easily read, sometimes repetitious, but very worthwhile. *Vision of Peace* could well be on the "must" list of spiritual reading for all religious. Some will benefit more through the realization under the author's tutelage that action and contemplation are actually combined in the living of the monastic life; others will profit greatly from the insights obtained in the discussions of the vows, silence, family courtesy, and the kinds of prayer. All, whether belonging to a monastic order or not, will find much food for thought in this excellent study of the Rule of Saint Benedict.

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